

A NEW MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT: BETWEEN EMPOWERMENT OF THE COMMUNITY AND GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to the actual debates concerning the need to support the economic growth in Romania, and the reforming process that complied with requirements of reducing gender-based, age-based, and social-based inequities in producing and accessing welfare.

This research tries to answer an actual question, namely how prepared is the Romanian society to adopt this model of development? The answer to this question involves directing the research along two perspectives: (1) one provided by the new concept of development, and (2) one that focuses on public policies designed under a larger framework than the one provided by the European requirements of equal opportunity for men and women.

Pragmatically, the achievement of such a structural model implies overcoming a variety of challenges. On the one hand, are the members of the community aware of the importance of their commitment? Are they truly motivated to take part in such a structure? On the other hand, how prepared are political representatives and public authorities to accept co-operation with different categories of persons? This research will try to find the answers to all these questions.

Keywords: social capital, empowerment of the local community, new concept of development, social inequities, gender inequities.



1. Introduction

Since the last decades of the last century, there have been numerous efforts to stimulate debate about development and to highlight its contested nature. Critical alternative ideas gave birth to alternative approaches. These have originated with various NGOs, grassroots development organizations, individuals, UN organizations, and private foundations. Disparate *social movements* not directly related to the development agenda have contributed to the advent of alternative viewpoints, for example, the woman's movement, the peace movement, and movements for democracy (Thomas, 2000).

This alternative conception of development (Ekins, 1992, p. 99) argued that the process of development should be: (1) need-oriented (material and non-material); (2) endogenous (coming from within a society); (3) self-reliant (in terms of human, natural, and cultural resources); and (4) ecologically sound.

In *Reinventing Government*, Osborne and Gaebler advocate for a new and innovative form of development. Addressing pragmatically and lucidly this transformation, the two authors propose the adoption of a series of new principles: empowerment of the citizens by transferring control from bureaucracy to community; competition between public service providers; a mission-led system, rather than a system led by rules and regulations; performance evaluation based on recorded successes/failures, independent of the resources used; focus on meeting community needs and not those of the bureaucracy; abandonment of the reactive behavior in favor of a proactive (anticipatory) approach; focus on earnings and not on expenditure, according to the *enterprise* model; decentralization and encouragement of a participatory management; an economic market mechanism preferred to the one bureaucratic and centralized (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, pp. 87-90).

Such structures vary in purpose from global to local. Grassroots organizations challenge entrenched power structures as people defend their rights, and as they define them, seeking local control and empowerment.

In other words, the achievement of this new development model means giving up old paradigms and accepting some innovative approaches in which citizens are, at the same time, co-participants in the decision-making process regarding the new development of the community they benefit from.

Moreover, the approach of the new model imposes paying closer attention to results. Focusing on results expresses the need for the creation of a strategic vision of the expected outcome, vision which takes into consideration, on the one hand, making the best out of the positive influences of external factors, and on the other hand, reducing (eliminating) the threats coming from the latter.

The proposed model contains both organizations that provide public services for the community and the actors that surround it. The latter are either customers/users of the service or representatives of the community's interests.

This construction represents a potential *solution based on co-operation* between all the actors required, not just in the form of co-operation between governments but also through co-operation between governments (central, regional, and local) and civil

society associations or other stakeholders such as media and business (Pollitt, Bouckaert and Löffler, 2006, p. 8).

As a first conclusion, the configuration of the constitutive context of this new model implies the need for a new strategic and innovative thinking in the relationship between central administration and local and regional administrative organizations, between administrations and citizens belonging to local and regional communities, between administrations and different groups of stakeholders (Popescu, 2006).

Secondly, there is an urgent demand to make central and local administration structures more efficient (compatible with the flexible structure of meta-organization) and to limit the decision-making capacity of administrations by involving citizens and community interest groups in the decision-making process.

The traditionally controversial relationship between the public service supplier and the consumer is replaced with a creative cooperation and collaboration relationship between the governance actors.

As main beneficiaries of public services, citizens must be involved in the entire public service provision process. This new government philosophy requires new arrangements, materialized in a new institutional design, capable to stimulate the citizens' involvement (Maloney, Smith and Stoker, 2000).

Pragmatically, the achievement of such a structural model implies overcoming a variety of challenges. On the one hand, are the members of the community aware of the importance of their commitment? Are they truly motivated to take part in such a structure? On the other hand, how prepared are political representatives and public authorities to accept co-operation with different categories of citizens? In terms of this work, the answer to these questions is found in the two pillars of the model proposed, and are detailed below.

2. Local community empowerment

Grassroots movements play an important role in challenging entrenched structures of power in formal democratic societies. In the face of an increasing globalization, erosion of local community control over daily life and extension of the power of the market and of the transnational corporations, people are standing up for their rights as they define them. They make a case for local control and local empowerment as the heart of development. They protect what they identify as the immediate source of their survival and they reject the dominant agenda of public or private (government-controlled) spheres and set an alternative one (Thomas, 2000). In these circumstances, development is about facilitating community participation and its leading role in deciding what sort of development is appropriate for it.

In consequence, the purpose of this strategic approach is the creation of human capital through sustainable societies in social, cultural, political and economic terms.

The core ideas and assumptions of this approach are democratic inclusion, participation, for example, voice for marginalized groups, and local control. In other words, it appears the issue of defining the 'good citizen'. The political theory tries

to address this problem by emphasizing the solidarity and tolerance of the state's authority, public participation and individual autonomy. Dalton defines citizenship as a 'set of norms of what people think people should do as good citizens' (Dalton, 2008a, p. 78). This approach implies the development of an especially important resource, *i.e.* the social capital.

2.1. Social capital

The social capital implies a notion of capital directly analogue to physical financial capital. Presumably, it is something that can be accumulated, invested, and used efficiently to produce a surplus possible to appropriate.

Frances Fukuyama finds in social capitals' underlying logic the key to the cultural determinants of social progress and economic prosperity. For Fukuyama (1992), of equal if not greater importance than the economic progress made possible by these combinations of rational economic action and traditional virtue of civic communitarianism, are the political implications of the social capital.

The social capital expresses the degree of citizen involvement in community affairs, which, powerfully influences the performance of government and social institutions (Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 1993a). In recent years, World Bank and OECD used it as another way of encouraging 'community value' and 'good governance'.

Civic traditions, in which agreed rules of behavior and trust between participants are encouraged, generate social connectedness and social participation, enabling participants to act together more effectively in the pursuit of shared objectives.

Narayan (1999) offers the following classification of social capital, depending on the effects in the development plan:

1. social capital created by relations between groups (called *linkage/connection social capital* – 'bridging social capital'). The relations established between groups, even if they are weak, prove to be productive in what concerns the social development of the entire community; and
2. social capital created by the relations within a group (called *social capital for maintaining the cohesion of groups* – 'bonding social capital'). This, in the absence of bridging capital, has negative effects on global development.

Woolcock and Narayan (2000) distinguish a special type of bridging social capital, called 'linking social capital' and identify it through the vertical connections established between citizens and officials occupying key-positions in the formal institutions of the social system.

One of the consequences of this type of capital, namely, *social trust*, has a strong effect on government, in the sense that stimulating the interest to participate to the community's public affairs is possible only *through the creation of trust-supplying institutions* at organizational level, but also at society level, overall.

For Putman social capital in the Italian regions he studied (1993b) was the direct result of the civic traditions originated in the nineteenth century, and he stresses the older civic traditions in the United States, which are now under threat. Social networks

and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them are constitutive for social capital (Putnam, 2000, p. 19).

However, Coleman (1998) has a more contingent concept of social capital, the level of which can change over time depending upon interactions between social actors. The creation and destruction of the social capital is possible in the short run just like other forms of capital, so it is relatively easy to create either a virtuous cycle of decline or mistrust. This depends rather upon the nature of a third party influence or enforcement agencies, and the potential contribution in the production of trust.

Social capital is a layered concept that includes five main elements, namely trust, reciprocity and cooperation, social networks, common rules of behavior, social compromise and feeling of belonging. It is subject to a set of factors with negative influence that we can regroup as follows: violence, corruption, weak legislative system, authoritarianism in solving conflicts and weak citizen participation in initiatives or projects having as common goal the general interest of the community.

In Romania, the government and multilateral agencies see the social capital as synonymous to economic growth within the context of a free market economy, and the individuals sell their work for money, rather than produce to meet their families' needs. The approach of the development process can be understood downwards through several large projects initiated by central agencies. Such an approach in which the broad lines of development of the local communities are decided at a national level does not succeed in persuading the community members to contribute to its development.

In conclusion, there is an imperative demand for structural reform within central and local administration, in order to maximize efficiency (so that they become compatible with flexible structures – network type) and increase the administration decision-making capability through citizens' involvement and community empowerment (Popescu, 2011).

3. Focusing on public policies to encourage equal opportunities for men and women

The second feature of the model we are suggesting takes into consideration the development of public policies that have the following goals: (a) equality in economic life; (b) equal participation in the decision-making process; (c) equality in social life; and (d) exchange of traditional roles and overcoming gender stereotypes.

The main instruments taken into consideration in order to achieve the previously mentioned goals are putting into practice the plans for gender equality; introducing legislation regarding equality of opportunity; and constitutive approach of gender equality in order to generate structural changes in society.

3.1. Economic life

Annual statistic records show great differences between women's and men's situation and comparing the data in time reveals that the economic differences tend to increase. After interpreting the data, the conclusion is *a structural bias of men*, a phenomenon

resulted from the biased character of the structures and most of the economic policies in Romania (but its real size is quasi-global).

The detailed analysis of the phenomenon (Miroiu, 2003) reveals that it acts on three levels:

1. *Daily attitudes and actions.* The best example is the presence of biased attitudes in a family resulted from the under-estimation of women’s contribution to family income because generally women provide unpaid household services.

2. *Economic theories.* It is less noticeable as economists use a neutral language. The theories contain the hidden supposition that time and effort necessary to reproduce the labor force are free as if they were natural resources available to be exploited free of charge. These economic models assume that time and efforts to raise children, to educate them in the family (traditionally assumed by the mother) are free.

3. *Public policies.* In Western countries, women had been quasi-invisible to the policy makers until the late 1970’s (when the feminism of the second wave started to be politically active). With few exceptions, women’s interests are not taken into account when wording the public policies. A very good example is the one of reducing the expenses on education and care services, which is largely transferred to the private (the family), so they become the responsibility of those who offer to deal with them free of charge.

Moreover, we have to mention the budgetary policies (past and present) which contribute substantially to the bias of men and, on the other hand, to the ‘feminizing’ of poverty because of the underfunding of the sectors ‘crowded’ by women (Miroiu, 2003).

Thus, the salaries in the sectors where women are the majority are lower than in those sectors in which men are the majority. The salaries in the sectors owned by the state, where two thirds of the employees are women, are below the average wage. According to the information gathered in 2008, women are in majority in the sectors of the national economy presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The sectors of national economy where women are in majority

National economy sectors	Percentage values
Health and social assistance	78.8%
Financial banking and insurance activities	71.3%
Education	69.5%
Hotels and restaurants	66%
Commerce	55.4%
Postal services and telecommunications	53.9%
Agriculture	50.4%

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2008

As the percentages above have not been altered significantly for a long time, we can say that women are traditionally in majority in these sectors.

Table 2: The sector of activity and the salary differences in Lei

Sector of activity	Salary differences (lei)
Health and social assistance	170
Financial, banking and insurance activities	521.9
Education	223.6
Hotels and restaurants	162.3
Commerce	303.7
Postal services and telecommunications	387.6
Agriculture	71.2
Industry	643.1

Source: Romanian Statistical Yearbook, 2008

From the analysis of Table 2, we can conclude that women's salaries compared to those of men are constantly lower, even in those activity sectors where they represent over 50%, the average difference being of 8.5%. Statistical data regarding pensions are not published, but we can assume that these differences are preserved and taken over by the pensions. They are also true for the social security rights that are decided according to individual salary.

Other statistical indicators reveal different access to promotion and career for men and women. Thus, in 2008, in the category of managers and superior clerks in public administration and social-economic organizations, men were twice as many as women. In 2008 women were in majority in the groups of clerks (72.8%), operators in services and commerce (72.3%), technicians, supervisors and other qualified personnel (62.2%), farmers and qualified workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing (50.4%). In 2006, there was almost the same situation. Women are mostly present in sectors of activity, which are poorly paid. This situation is not specific only to Romania. It is still present worldwide.

Women are increasingly preferred in the industries based on high technology. Instead, men are not encouraged to occupy positions traditionally taken by women, such as kindergarten teachers, baby-sitters, nurses, house cleaners and secretaries. Thus, they have limited access to the labor market.

After analyzing the statistical data, we can say that women represent a category that is more vulnerable to the effects of the transition, characterized by an increased rate of long-term unemployment; limited access to jobs in general and especially well paid ones; increased underground economy that does not ensure access to the social security system.

3.2. Family life

Concerning family life, the Family Code, the normative document that institutes basic laws in the field, contains the first discrimination; the minimum age at which partners can marry is different for women and men. Women can marry at 16, with medical approval at 15, while men can marry at 18, after receiving all civil and political rights.

This discrimination leads to inequality between partners as regarding the rights exercised during their marriage, and can lead to inequality of social status between partners (girls might drop out of school in order to fulfill household tasks) and even to early deterioration of women's health.

In principle, the Family Code ensures equal juridical status for both spouses. In reality, women have more family responsibilities than men do. Under the influence of an anachronistic traditional model, it is considered to be women's duty to manage the family resources, to fulfill the household tasks considered 'easy and small' (household provision, cooking, ironing, cleaning), to supervise and take care of children and elders, and, in most cases, all these are added to professional responsibilities. In their turn, men fulfill 'difficult and important' tasks, such as construction and painting works, repairing and maintenance of equipment, which actually require professionals. Consequently, women's free time is much shorter than men's.

Violence is another distress that affects family life. Ignored or unacknowledged officially, during the totalitarian period, violence has not only revealed itself, but, at present, it has also increased due to low living standards and increased economic insecurity. Unemployment, alcoholism, accommodation problems and educational flaws are among the many factors that contribute to the maintenance and spreading of this phenomenon to alarming dimensions. Its most frequent victims are women and children.

3.3. Public life and participation in the decision-making process

Although Romania has made progresses in meeting the assumed commitments regarding human rights, men's equal participation in social life is not ensured. High-level political decision-making spheres, party structures or public administration institutions are not equally available to both men and women, women often being stuck in performing activities without real promotion or assertion opportunities in the first line of politics.

Disproportionate participation of women and men in public life and decision-making best reflects the existence and perpetuation of sexual discrimination. Indisputably, men dominate political world and parties' life, although equal political rights for all citizens, men and women, have been legislated for over sixty years.

Few parties have included in their status the principle of equality between men and women, and those that have done it, mostly social-democratic parties, have failed in adopting the suitable strategies to put it into practice. No political party has a woman as chairperson and few women are part of their leadership.

The consequence is that only a few women have been included in the election lists and even fewer women were elected. Thus, out of 471 MPs only 11% are women, a percent that we meet again in Hungary, while the EU average is 24%. Moreover, in eight EU member states the percentage is above 30%. For comparison, in 1990, after the first free elections, the share of women in Parliament was 34%.

One cannot note a different situation in the share of women in the government, where, there are only three jobs of Ministers taken by women out of 17, which means

17.6%. The EU average is 27%, and in 17 of the 27 member states, the percentages exceed 30%, peaking at 55% in Finland and 50% in Spain.

For years, a series of voices said consistently that the Romanian society is not ready to accept a woman as President or Prime Minister, a view reinforced by the fact that Romania is last in the EU regarding the share of women in Parliament. In the same period, a woman heads Germany; the difference between Segolene Royal and Sarkozy was very small at the last French presidential elections; Obama confronted Hilary Clinton and the list could go on.

In central public administration, women are allocated according to the same pyramidal scheme: many of them have subordinated jobs, of performers or limited in responsibilities, and fewer and fewer occupy decision-making positions.

Surprisingly, this evolution takes place amid an increasing gap between men and women in terms of education level: between 1991 and 2009 the number of graduates in the Romanian higher educations was 1.69 million, of which 963.000 (57%) were women, and 727.000 were men, in recent years reaching weights of 60%/40%. This evolution made the share of women with higher education in total employment to be much higher than men (18.1% of employed women have higher education, compared to 13.9% of men).

Without being spectacular, a certain change occurred in the economic area, women's wider access to executive positions in some economic organizations, especially in the private sector, represents a beginning in the acknowledgment of their entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

3.4. Public consciousness

In the communist period, the equality between men and women was strongly supported, at least according to the official ideology. It was one of the most important post-war ideas used in the modernization process of the Romanian society. Even if this equality led to women having too many responsibilities when it was translated into practice (they became men's working comrades and still responsible almost exclusively for the household chores, raising and educating the children, taking care of the elders), the model it had started from, that of gender equality, was modern and progressive. The attempt to shape the society as to abolish the preconception that a gender was superior to the other was contemporary to the civilized world evolution in the sixth and seventh decades of the last century.

Women's emancipation movements imposed reconsidering the traditional roles and perception of women and men in society and family in the countries with advanced democracies. The desire to separate completely from the past made the post-revolutionary transition give up this myth considered as being 'communist' without the concern of finding an alternative social model based on personal development and assertion regardless the gender.

After 1989, the role of mass media became essential in forming an opinion about the social realities and in promoting contemporary models. However, Romanian

mass media is still far from promoting positive messages about gender partnership or women's social participation. The usage of some discriminatory clichés continues and sometimes is amplified both in written and audio-visual mass media, thus contributing to the perpetuation of several distorted representational models for men and women in the public consciousness.

Products and images promoting certain feminine models have invaded the Romanian society since 1989, although Western societies have given them up for decades. They promote women as sexual objects; frivolous beings concerned only by their physical appearance, beautiful but stupid (commercials with blonde-haired women); or irresponsible mothers who kill, abuse or abandon their child/children. Violence against women has become the media support for breaking news, as has the phenomenon of expansion of prostitution and sexual slavery, including the juvenile one.

Although the active female population constitutes almost a half of the total active population, women's image as professionals cannot be found in the models that dominate the society, unless it means a certain type of 'profession' that needs to be legalized as soon as possible.

Lacking a contemporary model to direct social behavior and relationships between men and women in public and private life, the Romanian society seems to take as a guide the traditional patriarchal models whose main flaw is conservatism. It makes them unable to control realities, which are much different from those that inspired them, and undesirable as an option for the future.

Because of the free post-revolutionary Romanian society, we may assume that the Western models of relationships between men and women would influence the Romanian society. However, it is far from building a model of partnership in the family and society based on respect and the acknowledgement of everybody's value, and where gender differences are not considered or turned into deficiencies able to prevent each human being from free self-assertion and development.

A first step towards modernity would be defining and promoting the cultural model of relationship between men and women that the Romanian society wants to adopt, but the national cultural standards cannot overlook the evolutions recorded within the European Union.

4. Conclusions

The results of the case study on public policies aimed at encouraging equal opportunities for men and women, considered for the sake of supporting the new development model in Romania are not at all encouraging.

The situation presented above is far from reflecting the whole reality. This short report intends to point out only some of the big differences between men and women and its main purpose is to draw the attention to the fact that the actual social model is completely inequitable and must change through a common effort.

The worrying fact is that the main tendencies concerning men and women's situation in Romania indicate an alarming involution due to insufficient action initiated by the

government, although there have been efforts of the representatives of the civil society. Recent data show that due to the lack of some progressive models, the contemporary Romanian society is heading towards a patriarchal model in building relationships between men and women in both family and public life.

Based on poverty and negative social evolution of the Romanian transition this model generates retrograde and discriminatory behavior and practices. It implies the idea of inferiority/superiority of a certain gender. In practice, it allows different attitudes according to this criterion, which runs counter the elementary democratic principles.

Elimination of sexual discrimination, visible or discreet, is one of the conditions necessary to build an equitable society and it supposes actual involvement from authorities and each politician.

Moreover, because of the expansion of the European Union, Romania has to choose between remaining an archaic-traditional island with cultural models and corresponding production relationships, or integrating into a space regulated by Western democracy and civilization standards with cultural options and progressive production relationships. If the choice is heading to the evolution towards the European social model, the political decision makers can no longer ignore either the problems related to the big differences between men and women's situation or the economic and social consequences generated by them.

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